Undiscovered Powers in Man and Nature

by N. SRI RAM

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The Third Object of the Society reads :

To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man

First of all, is the word 'unexplained' the right word in that sentence? Should it not really be 'undiscovered'? The word 'unexplained' implies that we have already identified the laws, we perceive their existence, but they have not been explained because of some obscurity in them or because of their complex or complicated nature, whereas the word 'undiscovered' would imply only the presumption that there are laws unknown to us at present.

The field of the Third Object suggests an open expanse, open to exploration, and it can be conceived as including everything uncommon or seemingly miraculous, such as the phenomena which H. P. Blavatsky performed in her time. In her first work, *Isis Unveiled*, she ranges over a vast field covering almost everything out of the ordinary, or unexplained at that time : clairvoyance of various sorts, leaving the body at will and travelling to a distance, feats of levitation, psychometry, reading the mysteries of the past, intercourse with the dead and other non-physical entities, materializations, the passage of matter through matter, and so forth. Perhaps we can include in such studies even the

rationale of astrology, not the art of astrology or the practice of it, but rather the whole theory which underlies the significance of the zodiacal signs and the planets, their positions and relationships, the attribution to them of certain influences on our lives and the events that take place. All that is beyond what we can see directly for ourselves, but while it may be interesting as a matter of study, it cannot, I think, really come under the description of Theosophy as the Divine Wisdom. We must not confuse knowledge, even of the occult side of Nature, with Wisdom which springs from the depths of a certain nature in ourselves. It would certainly be of interest and useful to know how gravitation can be reversed. It seems there are scientists both in the United States and in Russia who are at work on that very question. But even if man finds out that secret, it would not necessarily make him wise in any real sense.

Although the Third Object speaks of laws and powers, much work accomplished through these powers is a description. For instance, the literature concerning the astral and mental planes, the etheric body, the chakras, and so forth, reads like the description of some extraordinary region and of the activities taking place there.

It is said sometimes that we do not pay much attention to the Third Object these days, but we have to realize that investigation of this kind requires people trained to undertake it, and even then their competence and findings cannot easily be proved to others. There will always be room therefore for scepticism and differences. A person who is psychic or clairvoyant may say, 'I see such and such things', but he may be seeing only projections of what is already subconscious-

ly in himself, creating forms out of his own ideas and visualizing them. It is only people who have the necessary training and faculties who can undertake investigation in a real sense, as distinguished from mere study of what others have said on the subject. As what the seers or investigators, competent in different degrees, say is not open to verification by us, we have to judge it with our own reason and understanding. The work of the Third Object, in the sense of investigating the unexplained and the latent, can therefore be undertaken only by individuals on their own responsibility, or occasionally by a team, and not by the Society as a whole. Neither C. W. Leadbeater, nor even H. P. B., were officially commissioned to undertake any such task; they undertook whatever they did along that line of their own accord and published the results of their researches for the benefit of all.

Of course we can interpret the Third Object to include such activities as are carried on by the Psychical Research Society. But there seems to be no point in the Theosophical Society duplicating the work of such a body, any more than it should duplicate the activities of scientists, although their activities are also concerned with truth or aspects of the truth. Nor do I think it would be wise for us officially to start yoga classes to arouse kundalini, stimulate the chakras, or do anything of that sort by which we may be doing the greatest harm to the people concerned, although there are people who think that these are things that we should be doing. It is not our business, as a Society, to engage in activities of a spiritualistic nature, even if some good results could be obtained thereby.

If the Society's aims are philanthropic and spiritual in essence, we must keep that aim steadily in view and

not cause confusion in the minds of people between spirituality and psychism. We must be careful not to invest the Society with a character that does not belong to it, identifying it with psychic pursuits of different sorts.

In the East—especially in India—the great spiritual teachers have regarded the possession of psychic powers in general as a liability rather than an asset on the path of spiritual progress. Whether or not that is so would depend very much on the person who possesses these powers and the way he uses them, the kind of person he is and his motives. In any case, the *seeking* of such powers—which is usually out of motives that tend towards the sensational, even when they are not actually selfish—becomes a distraction from the discovery of the truth about oneself, from self-knowledge. We may, of course, consider and discuss what is given out by an individual by the use of such powers and all interested can join in such discussion. In other words, as a Society, we can only investigate at the intellectual level, that is, study and discuss, and there are many Lodges which engage in such work. That kind investigation is really the widening of the field of scientific and philosophical observation and thought.

HOW IT GREW AND CHANGED

I might here point out the various versions we have had in the past of this Third Object, as they throw light upon the thought of the leading people in the Society as it has developed. It will give us a little insight into what is actually behind the present wording. When the Society was started in 1875, the only Object mentioned in its bye-laws was as follows : 'The Objects

of the Society are to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe'. There is no mention at all of Brotherhood; the idea of Brotherhood, as the records show, appears for the first time in the history of the Society in 1878. Colonel Olcott, the President-Founder, records the fact that Brotherhood was not thought of in the beginning. In fact, the whole question whether Brotherhood should be the primary Object, or Occultism in the ordinary sense of the term, was a matter of considerable discussion between the Adepts and those with whom they corresponded, namely, Mr Sinnett and Mr Hume.

In 1878, activities commenced in England with the formation of a body entitled the British Theosophical Society, and that Society issued a circular in which it was stated that it was founded 'for the purpose of discovering the nature and powers of the human soul and Spirit by investigation and experiment'—an ambitious undertaking apparently adopted without any clear idea of what it involved. In February 1880, the General Council of the Society formulated certain Objects which correspond to the present Third Object, and these were as follows:

> First, 'To keep alive in man the spiritual intuitions'.

It was not stated how that was going to be attempted.

> Secondly, 'To oppose and counteract after due investigation and proof of its irrational nature, bigotry in every form, whether as an intolerant religious sectarianism or belief in miracles or anything supernatural'.
>
> Thirdly, 'To seek to obtain knowledge of all of the laws of Nature and aid in diffusing it; and especi-

ally to encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people and so termed the Occult Sciences'.

I do not know whether the words 'all of' were put in advisedly, or whether it was because of the tendency of all of us to speak in unqualified terms exceeding what we actually mean.

In 1883 and also in 1884 various modifications of these objects were adopted by different Lodges to suit their ideas and fancies. Apparently they could do so because the parent Society was not organized sufficiently to guide them nor had the aims been generally agreed upon and fixed at that time. There was the Himalayan Theosophical Society, for instance, which regarded itself as a rather superior body. It included Mr A. P. Sinnett and Mr A. O. Hume, and its objects were stated in these terms: First, 'Universal Brotherhood'; apparently this was put down as a concession to the Adepts, who insisted upon Brotherhood as the primary aim. Secondly, 'The union of the individual Monad with the Infinite and Absolute'; an aim laudable enough, but permitting some doubt as to whether those who formulated it had any idea of the actual nature of what was adumbrated. Then thirdly, and this sounds almost commonplace after that second grandiose aim: 'The study of the hidden mysteries of Nature and the development of the psychical powers latent in man'.

The London Lodge, which was a very active and important body in the early history of the Society when Mr Sinnett was associated with it, formulated this object as follows: 'The investigation of the nature of existence, with a view to the comprehension and realization of the higher potentialities of man, and the

revival of research connected with occult science and esoteric philosophy'. The inclusion of the phrase 'the nature of existence' seems to be also an indication of the vagueness as regards what was to be investigated that obtained in various groups at that time. Also we may note a distinction is made here between occult science and esoteric philosophy, or perhaps the phrases were used to refer to two different sides of the same undertaking.

In the Annual Report of 1885, ten years after the founding, the Third Object was defined as follows: 'The Third Object, pursued by a portion of the members of the Society, is to investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers of man'. The First Object was very much as at present, but the Second Object, instead of speaking of comparative religion, philosophy and science, speaks of 'Aryan and other Eastern religions and philosophies'. Coming down to 1890, we find the Third Object reduced to a near approximation of its present form: 'To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the psychic powers latent in man'. Later the word 'psychic' was omitted and the Object was put in the form in which it is to-day. Mr Jinarajadasa, in *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society,* makes the following comment on these various versions: 'It was merely the outer form that had to find an adequate expression through the various changes'.

H.P.B., in *The Key to Theosophy,* makes a clear distinction between a Theosophist and an occultist. 'The latter', she says, 'is concerned with the hidden processes in Nature, the secret potency of things in Nature.' In an article entitled, 'Recent Progress in Theosophy'—apparently the article was written at

about the same time—she explained: 'The Third Object, pursued by a portion of the fellows of the Society, is to investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the psychic nature of man. There are two general objects and one restricted object of attention. Only a portion of our fellows occupy themselves with the occult properties of matter and the psychical powers of man'. I do not know if there is any member at present who is occupying himself with the occult properties of matter.

'The Society as a whole,' she wrote further, 'is not concerned with this branch of research, and naturally, for, out of every 10,000 people one may meet, the chances are that but a very small minority have the time, taste, or ability to take up such delicate and baffling studies. We thought it a good thing to proclaim this line of research and self-discovery as the third of our three Objects. For those who are interested in it and all enquirers whom they can reach and encourage the mystical philosophical books of the present and former times have been written'.

From what I have just quoted, it is to be noted that she did not regard the mystical philosophical works of the past as outdated by later writings. There are persons who think that what we call Theosophical literature has completely superseded all earlier works, sometimes called 'historical Theosophy'. Also, she includes 'self-discovery' as coming under the Third Object. That is work in which all of us can engage.

CRITERIA OF TRUTH

I would like to consider here the kind of mind that is needed for the study of Occultism. For this study par-

ticularly, as in investigating any aspect of truth, there must be a mind which is truthful in the strictest sense, that is, a mind which does not prevaricate, does not gloss over things the truth of which is inconvenient to itself, has no vested interest in any ideas, does not deceive itself, and does not project concepts agreeable to itself. I do not know which of us has such a mind, but it seems to me perfectly obvious that before we can study Occultism in earnest and make a success of it, we have to have that kind of mind. If a person is conditioned in certain ways, whatever concepts he may project are likely to partake of that conditioning.

We might also consider the question of what might be regarded as valid knowledge, that may be applied. Obviously, what is perceived or experienced by a person is an item of knowledge to him, not necessarily an absolute proof of the truth he may imagine it to be, but true so far as it goes. I see something that looks to me to be solid and green, but the nature of the thing may be quite different from the way I see it. In any case, it will have various aspects which are not evident to me. Therefore it is not the absolute or the whole truth which I perceive or experience. Nevertheless, as a perception or as an experience that has come to me, as evidence, it has its own significance. Secondly, when we register certain facts, the relations between them, the inferences which we draw from our perceptions have obviously a validity on the same plane as the perceptions themselves. It may have more validity as a process of thought, for the premises may be wrong while the reasoning is right. Thirdly, we may accept provisionally statements coming from what we consider to be knowledgeable sources. In this connection the question would arise as to whether the source *is*

really knowledgeable as regards the matters in question. If I want to know something about conditions in Antarctica, naturally I have to accept the statements of those who have been to that part of the globe, provided I consider those persons to be trustworthy.

In the same way, there are many statements in *The Mahatma Letters* which are accepted by very many members because they have reason to believe that this knowledge comes from a source which is very reliable in these matters. Apart from all this, it is also legitimate to frame a hypothesis—a hypothesis which explains, which is consonant with facts and illuminates them. In modern Science there is the constant framing of hypotheses, theories and equations and later amendment of them. When we entertain a theory, we must not equate it in our own minds with absolute truth. It explains; to entertain it on that basis seems to me to be perfectly legitimate; for then it does not diminish the freedom to progress towards a larger or the absolute truth.

Then one might add that there is what we call Intuition, a much misunderstood term. Real intuition is either an undistorted perception springing from, or a creation by, the total consciousness. To include intuition as a form of knowing does not seem to me to be unscientific. It depends on what we mean by that word. Before the faculty of true Intuition can come into play there has to be a cessation of wishful thinking and the mind has to be clear of preconceived ideas. Just as there has to be temperance, moderation, in our physical living, so there has also to be austerity in one's thinking, not deviation into pleasant paths. When we imagine because we like to imagine, go off into fantasies of different kinds, it becomes a kind of indulgence;

but to come to the truth, one should have that quality of austerity which keeps clear of the propensity to fall for what is, for the time being, comforting and pleasant.

LAWS OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES

The laws of Nature can be of different classes. First there are the laws of matter in different grades, whether these be the kind cognized by our senses or those beyond their limited range. Then there are laws which pertain to the nature of life, its characteristics, its action and evolution. Then there are the laws of the mind, of psychology and the psyche. To these I would add the laws of harmony, which are an entire branch of the whole subject, involving the intuitive perception of harmonies and discords in many different fields. When you listen to music you say : 'Well, that is a harmony'. How do you establish the harmony to your own satisfaction? There is no tangible way of proving to another the harmony you experience. It is by an intuitive perception that one knows or feels the harmony in sounds or colours or movements or anything else. I would say further that there is such a thing as the laws of one's own inner being or Spirit. That might sound a little mystical and vague. I will explain what I mean presently. There can be laws that in their operation comprehend several different levels of existence, such as the law of Karma, which in one aspect is mechanical and invariable, yet in another aspect is moral and involves the concept of justice. Somehow these two aspects are co-ordinated in Karma as we understand it.

I spoke of the law of the Spirit. The question may be asked : Is not the nature and action of the Spirit to be

identified wholly with freedom? Can you speak of law when you refer to freedom? But let us consider this fact: the action of this most interior principle of the Spirit results every time in a perfect creation; and what is perfect or perfectly constructed always embodies a law. For instance, there may be a perfect musical composition, or a perfectly shaped vase. The artist just looks at the form of the vase or listens to the music and says it is perfect. It is also the artistic sense which brought it into existence. But if with another type of mind you examine the construction of the vase or the musical symphony, you will find certain concrete laws embodied in the construction. The artist, without going through a process of thought, has embodied a form of law in the creation which he produces and the law which is embodied is always a law of harmony. It is an un-thought-out law. So we may say of a creation by the Spirit that it follows the law of its own being.

Everywhere in nature there are laws, but there is also freedom, for nature—including man—is an intermixture of Spirit and Matter, or, to use the Sanskrit words which are pregnant with meaning, *purusha* and *prakriti*. *Prakriti* is that which has come into existence by a process, *purusha* is eternally one and undifferentiated; it is the energy that exists always, but periodically electrifies the root of matter. The Atman, the universal spiritual principle that is at the base of that energy, is omnipresent, it is at every point, and every manifestation of it has an aspect of eternity. The manifestation is limited, because to manifest itself, the Atman, the spark of the Divine, has to be embodied in some type of vesture and its action, its light, is limited and broken up by the vesture. That which has in it the

nature of eternity can be symbolized by a circle, whether large or small. But the circle has to be squared within the limitations of the body of matter. That is how things are in nature. Perhaps the various Platonic solids are really stages in the approximation to the sphere, which is a form of a circle and is said to be the perfect geometrical figure .

POWERS RELATED TO STATE OF BEING

Now as regards the powers latent in man. If they are really latent, how are you going to investigate or observe them? You cannot investigate that which you cannot observe, which you cannot touch at all. The powers have somehow to be brought out of the state of latency, before you can see them, study or handle them in any manner. We should not, perhaps, be too literal-minded, but take these phrases as they are generally understood. The powers latent in man are latent in a nature that exists as one of a number of approximations to the Ultimate, the inmost Spirit. At every level there is an approximation which is a certain layer of being. We might, broadly speaking, divide these natures into psychic and spiritual.

We might regard the constitution of man as having a base and an apex, the apex being a dimensionless point, which may be regarded as representing the consciousness, as yet untouched by any process of time, which is in that intangible moment, namely the present, that divides the past from the future. There are the intermediate levels or planes between that base and the apex. When the relationship is directly between the apex, that is to say, the dimensionless point, and the base which may be regarded as that sub-stratum

of all things, *akasha*, then the relationship is spiritual. But when the relationship is with one of the intermediate levels, then it can be spiritual or it can be psychic, as the case may be. There are powers appropriate to each layer of being.

This is brought out by H. P. Blavatsky in a striking manner in an article on spiritual progress, in which she refers to psychic powers and the work of the Theosophical Society. She points out that to become an Adept, who has marvellous powers, one has to become

> 'a new man, more perfect in every way than he is at present, and if he succeeds, his capabilities and faculties will receive a corresponding increase of range and power, just as in the visible world we find that each stage in the evolutionary scale is marked by the increase of capacity. This is how it is that the Adept becomes endowed with marvellous powers that have so often been described, but the main point to be remembered is that these powers are the natural accompaniments of existence on a higher plane of evolution, just as the ordinary human faculties are the natural accompaniments of existence on the ordinary human plane.'

People so often think of cultivating this or that power, they want to work on the solar plexus or some other centre in their bodies, but the way is entirely different. The so-called powers are really the fruitage of the living tree which is the human being. H. P. B. says further :

> 'The Society was founded to teach no new and easy paths to the acquisition of "powers"; its only mission is to re-kindle the torch of truth, so long extinguished for all but the very few, and to keep that truth alive by the formation of a fraternal

union of mankind, the only soil in which the good seed can grow.

In this connection we would warn all our members, and others who are seeking spiritual knowledge, to beware of persons offering to teach them easy methods of acquiring psychic gifts; such gifts are indeed comparatively easy of acquirement by artificial means, but fade out as soon as the nerve-stimulus exhausts itself. The real seership and adeptship which is accompanied by true psychic development, once reached, is never lost.'

In *The Mahatma Letters* there are some noteworthy statements concerning the secrets of occultism which apply to the higher psychic powers. The correspondents of the Mahatmas at that time complained that the Adepts seemed to grudge giving out the facts they knew. Then the Master says :

'The truth is that till the neophyte attains to the condition necessary for that degree of illumination to which, and for which, he is entitled and fitted, most if not all of the secrets are incommunicable.'

They cannot be put into words, they cannot even be transmitted by any telepathic means, when the mind of the other person is not prepared to receive these secrets. If this were not so, all that the Adepts would have to do would be to publish a handbook of the art which might be taught in schools. That is apparently the view that very many people entertain.

THIRD OBJECT: ITS SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

To sum up what I have said : the study of Occultism in general can do much good. It is the study of Nature,

taking her as a totality, not only what appears on the surface but also the hidden laws and processes. It can be marvellously enlightening, when one takes it up in earnest; for then instead of seeing only the superficial aspect of things, one sees through it, penetrates to the heart of existence, sees what lies behind the façade, the extension behind the appearance. We can all engage in such study, but to 'investigate' the hidden laws and powers requires the necessary capacity. The development of such capacity is an individual affair, not the business of the Society, which cannot have schools for such development. The seeking of power is dangerous, as it builds up self-importance, the desire to enjoy it and dominate, whether it is power in this world or power of a different character.

Whatever anyone declares to be true by the exercise of psychic powers may be worthy of consideration—that depends upon the person. But it should be taken with a grain of discrimination. When you do not accept a statement or reject it but just look at it or contemplate it you will know your own response. If you respond to the truth of it, you register that fact. This is really the attitude needed with regard to the pursuit of the Third Object, which to many people is exceedingly vague because they have not sorted out all the implications of what they believe or refuse to believe, do not have any clear idea of what Occultism is and what we can accept and what not. It is necessary to have in our minds a certain clarity with regard to our aims and undertakings, whether pertaining to the Third Object of the Society or anything else.

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